

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 SSM-03 SAA-01 SES-02  
CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00  
NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 /095 W  
-----108470 261830Z /45

R 251437Z AUG 78  
FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1611  
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
AMEMBASSY ATHENS  
AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV  
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK  
AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 2372

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PGOV, SHUM, IS, EG  
SUBJ: ST CATHERINE'S CONCERN FOR THE STATUS QUO

1. AT THE REQUEST OF MY GREEK COLLEAGUE, WHO HAS SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ST CATHERINE'S MONASTERY, I RECEIVED A DELEGATION FROM THE ARCHBISHOP OF SINAI, DAMIANOS.

2. THE TWO PRIESTS, FATHERS AARON AND GREGORY, STRESSED THAT THE GREEK CHRISTIANS HAD BEEN PRESENT AT MT SINAI FOR 1600 YEARS. THE ARCHBISHOP AND THE BROTHERHOOD HAD BECOME CONCERNED OVER REPORTS BEGINNING IN JANUARY, 1978, THAT PRESIDENT SADAT WISHED TO ERECT A CHURCH, A SYNAGOGUE, AND A MOSQUE ON MT. SINAI ON BEHALF OF "ALL THE SONS OF ABRAHAM." THIS DESIRE WAS REPEATED IN SADAT'S ALEXANDRIA UNIVERSITY SPEECH ON JULY 27 WHERE HE STATED HE WOULD LIKE TO LAY THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE ABOVE MENTIONED BUILDINGS AND PRAY ON MT SINAI ON THE FEAST OF EL ADHA ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HIS VISIT TO JERUSALEM.

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LEADERS OF VARIOUS FAITHS WERE INVITED TO ACCOMPANY HIM.

3. THE DELEGATION POINTED OUT THAT THERE WERE ALREADY CHURCHES, BOTH AT THE MONASTERY AND ON MT SINAI ITSELF. IN ADDITION, THE MONASTERY HAD PERMITTED THE ERECTION OF A SMALL MOSQUE ON THE SUMMIT OF MT SINAI NEAR THE CHURCH FOR USE OF THE BEDOUINS WHO WERE ATTACHED TO THE MONASTERY AND WHOSE ANCESTORS

HAD BEEN IMPORTED BY EMPEROR JUSTINIAN.

4. THE TWO FATHERS POINTED OUT THAT SADAT'S SCHEME, IF IMPLEMENTED, WOULD BE A RADICAL CHANGE FROM THE STATUS QUO AND WOULD VIOLATE NOT ONLY THEIR RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES BUT CANONICAL RULES. THEY LEFT A MEMORANDUM SUMMARIZING THEIR CONCERN AND ASKED THAT IT BE FORWARDED TO THE DEPARTMENT AND AMBASSADOR LEWIS. (ST CATHERINE'S CLAIMS OWNERSHIP OF LAND THREE DAYS' CAMEL RIDE IN ALL DIRECTIONS FROM THE MONASTERY.)

5. I COMMENTED THAT THE US WAS NOT INVOLVED IN THE MONASTERY'S STATUS AND THAT I WAS CERTAIN THE MONASTERY AND BROTHERHOOD HAD MEANS TO MAKE THEIR VIEWS AND CONCERNS KNOWN TO THE GOE.

6. THE DELEGATION POINTED OUT THAT THE MONASTERY WAS AUTONOMOUS AND THAT THE ARCHBISHOP WAS CONSECRATED BY THE GREEK PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEREBY ESTABLISHING A LINK TO THE STATUS QUO WHICH HAD BEEN RESPECTED BY VARIOUS TEMPORAL POWERS EVER SINCE OTTOMAN TIMES. THEY ADMITTED THAT THE US HAD NO FORMAL RESPONSIBILITIES FOR SINAI, HOWEVER, AS THE SUPER POWER EXERCISING ITS GOOD OFFICES BETWEEN ISRAEL AND EGYPT, THEY BELIEVED THE US SHOULD BE AWARE OF THEIR CONCERNS.

6. THE DELEGATION STRESSED THAT THE MONASTERY WAS NOT OPPOSED TO CHANGE PER SE, BUT WISHED THE ARCHBISHOP AND THE BROTHERHOOD TO BE CONSULTED PRIOR TO PROPOSING CHANGES IN THEIR  
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MONASTIC REGIME AND DOMAIN WHICH HAD EVOLVED THROUGHOUT 16 CENTURIES.

7. I PROMISED TO FORWARD THEIR MEMORANDUM TO THE DEPARTMENT. COPIES WILL BE POUCHED OTHER ADDRESSEES.  
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## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
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**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
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**Review Markings:**  
Sheryl P. Walter  
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